
Bagram News Express

Fighting Terror, Building Peace

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Secretary of Defense visits 455th AEW



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Rachel Martinez

Above -- Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates greets Airmen on the flightline here Sept. 17. Prior to meeting A-10 Thunderbolt II and F-15E Strike Eagle aircrew and maintainers, Secretary Gates received a briefing from the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing commander on air power in Afghanistan.

Right -- Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates gives a short press conference in front of an A-10 Thunderbolt II here Sept. 17. Secretary Gates discussed his thoughts on the Air Force mission here in Afghanistan after meeting some of the Airmen and hearing about the role they play in Operation Enduring Freedom.



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse

Willow Grove unit completes last A-10 deployment

By Staff Sgt. Rachel Martinez
455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan — The Pennsylvania Air National Guard unit stationed at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove will be transitioning to a Joint Interagency Installation as a result of the Department of Defense's 2005 Base Realignment and Closure

recommendations. With the new mission coming onboard, the 111th Fighter Wing is scheduled to loose its fleet of A-10 Thunderbolt IIs beginning in the spring of 2009. As they wrap up their current deployment to Bagram Air Field, it could very well be their last combat deployment with their beloved "warthog."

During their 45-day rotation here, the 103rd Expeditionary

Fighter Squadron, part of the 111th FW, gave it their all as they dropped more than 30,000 pounds of ordnance and fired more than 25,000 30 mm rounds while supporting the close air support mission over Afghanistan.

Lt. Col. Mike Shenk, 103rd EFS assistant director of operations has deployed six times with the 111th

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FW, and is completing his second rotation at Bagram.

“As far as kinetic ops, we are much busier this time,” he said, comparing this deployment to his previous one in December 2002 and January 2003. “Everyone in the squadron has been a part of a mission that dropped bombs or shot the gun.”

It’s not necessarily dropping bombs the aircrew likes to do; it’s having the opportunity to help troops on the ground.

“The A-10 air-to-ground mission gives us the opportunity to go out and do something specifically to help the guys on the ground. To be able to go out, take the pressure off, or get the enemy off of their back for even a little while is real gratifying,” Shenk said. “It’s not too uncommon to walk into the BX and run into some ground guys who ask us if we fly the A-10. They routinely tell us how much they appreciate us taking care of them.”

Despite being the last A-10 deployment for this unit, spirits have remained high.

“It’s been pretty impressive,” said Lt. Col. Thomas Fennell, 103rd EFS mission planning cell chief. “Everyone focuses on the task at hand and the things we can control versus those we can’t.”

Fennell, who has flown the A-10 for 10 years and is also on his second deployment to Bagram, cites one mission in particular as testament to the focus of the squadron. Two traditional guardsmen, who work as commercial pilots the majority of the time, responded to a “troops in contact” call from French troops.

The reality that this could be the last time they will fly the A-10 in combat is not far from the pilot’s minds.

“It saddens me that they are eliminating a combat squadron - a very capable one,” said Fennell. “It’s been one of the best combat squadrons I’ve been with.”

That same sentiment can be heard around the 111th FW maintainers deployed to the 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron.

“It’s kind of sad in a way,” said Master Sgt. Gregory Farnack, an A-10 crew chief. “We’ve always done a good job everywhere we went.”

Many of the 111th FW maintainers volunteered to



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Rachel Martinez

Staff Sgt. Kevin Bliem, 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron crew chief, marshals out an A-10 Thunderbolt II Sept. 12 at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan.

deploy this time - for the chance to work on the A-10s in combat one last time.

“In case it is the last time, we wanted to come and go out on a high note,” Farnack said.

This deployment has been more rewarding than challenging for many of the maintainers.

“The airplanes like to fly,” said Master Sgt. Anthony Miller, the maintenance production superintendent who has been with the unit for 20 years. “The more they fly the less they break. It’s a good feeling.”

Millers said it is also a good feeling when he sees the jets come back with no bombs.

“To me, I see the Air Force as planes,” he said. “Everybody had the mind frame that we have a job to do. Seeing the airplanes come back after dropping ordnance, we know we have a purpose. We know that every airplane we have up in the air is potentially saving someone’s life.”

As much as the pilots and maintainers enjoy working with the A-10, many of them said they will stay with the 111th FW even after the aircraft leaves.

“I’ve got no regrets,” said Fennell. “The things I’ve wanted to do, I’ve accomplished.”

“It’s been a lot of deployments for me,” added Shenk. “I’m looking forward to spending more time at home.”

Even for those who will leave the unit, they can be proud of what they’ve accomplished during this deployment. The entire 111th FW team on the ground and in the air put forth their best effort in supporting Operation Enduring Freedom with A-10 close air support.

Bagram flyboys celebrate Air Force's 61st birthday

By Tech. Sgt. Kevin Wallace
Combined Joint Task Force - 101

BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan — The sounds of AC-130 gunships, A-10s and F-15s roaring overhead is nothing new to the Soldiers stationed at Bagram, an Army air field in eastern Afghanistan. In fact, many ground forces here come to rely on the air power their brothers in blue bring to the fight daily.

Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and civilians all gathered in the Morale, Welfare and Recreation clamshell here Sept. 18 to rock to the sounds of the Combined Joint Task Force-101 band and to ring in the Air Force's 61st birthday.

Bagram is where the rubber meets the road and where Airmen must revolutionize their combat mindsets, explained by Brig. Gen. Tod D. Wolters, guest speaker and deputy commander for political-



U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse
Chief Master Sgt. Ray Clark and Airman 1st Class William Gazaway cut the Air Force birthday cake as the most junior and senior Airmen in attendance.



U.S. Air Force photo by Chief Master Sgt. Ray Clark
Nearly 300 Airmen, as well as a handful of Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and civilians, gathered to celebrate the Air Force's 61st anniversary at Bagram Sept. 18.

military affairs at Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan.

"We are finding ways to defeat this enemy right here, at Bagram, in the heart of the combat zone," said Wolter, a seasoned fighter pilot and life-long friend of Brig. Gen. Mike Holmes, the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing commander and ranking Airman on Bagram Air Field.

Since its activation in 2002, the 455th AEW, a tenant unit on BAF, has supported ground troops with close-air support and the airlift of supplies and troops.

Wolters explained that the Air Force goes beyond just the fly boys and noted that all Airmen contribute to the mission of: fly, fight and win.

Dedicating one's life to the force is the only true guarantee of success. Afghanistan-based Airmen are doing just that and accomplishing spectacular feats here in country, said Wolters.

When you compare 2008 to 2007, we are flying 156 percent more sorties and at the same time pinpointing accuracy, said Wolters, who noted the number of civilian casualties declined nearly 200% since last year.

For Wolters, whose family is rich in Air Force heritage, the success of his service is an unwavering commitment.

"The Air Force is the only life I know and I want no other one," he said. "When I go to my grave, I want to be draped in my service dress blues, just like my father."

With the conclusion of the general's remarks and a cake-cutting ceremony, all Airmen in attendance stood and, in unison, sung the Air Force song. A brisk look around revealed not only Airmen, but all service members where at the position of attention and singing along – which stood as a true testimony to the admiration and respect Bagram-based Airmen earned here.

Services Info

- ◆ First Run Movies: Sunday, Wednesday and Friday at 1000L and 1500L.
- ◆ Capoeira/Brazilian Martial Arts: Sunday from 2000L to 2200L and Tuesday from 1630L to 1830L.
- ◆ Abs Workout: Monday through Friday at 1215L.
- ◆ Salsa: Monday from 2030L to 2230L.
- ◆ Texas Hold'em: Tuesday at 1900L, Thursday at 1330L, and Saturday at 1330L and 1900L.
- ◆ Dominoes: Tuesday at 2100L
- ◆ Reggae Night: Wednesday from 2000L to 2300L.
- ◆ Spades: Thursday at 1800L.
- ◆ Blackjack: Thursday at 2100L.
- ◆ Bingo: Friday at 1900L.
- ◆ Hip Hop/R&B Night: Friday at 2030L.

Hometown News

Airmen who are deploying or redeploying can "get the word out" about notable events related to their service via the Hometown News Program. The process is easy - simply fill out, sign and return the Hometown News Release form to Public Affairs and PA will market these events to local media. Some examples of events include: award of Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO Medal, arrival for deployment, completion of deployment, etc. For more information, call public affairs at 431-3260.

News Briefs

NATO MEDALS

As AEF 3/4 comes to a close, most, if not all, military personnel should have received a NATO Medal for their tour of duty here at Bagram. If you have not received your medal by the time you depart Bagram, please utilize the email address/phone number below to check on the status. The medal submission process can take up to 90 days for approval and distribution back to the PERSCO team. The new PERSCO Team POC's for the NATO Medal will be Staff Sgt. Amethia Dandy and Tech. Sgt. Richard Jones. To follow-up on the status of your medal, you can reach them at DSN 318-431-4409 or 455emsg.persco@afghan.swa.army.mil

RESTRICTED AREA ESCORT TRAINING

If you are a holder of an Air Force Restricted Area Badge that has an open area with a number in it and or a letter E you are asked to attend a training session in order to receive an escort official competency card. Training classes are being held Monday through Friday each week throughout September and October from 0800 to 0900 at the Enduring

Faith Chapel Annex. All personnel departing Bagram by Oct. 31 are exempt from the class. Beginning Nov. 1 ESFS Restricted Area Entry Controllers will be checking for your Escort Certification/Competency Card, which is provided to escorts after training. If you have not attended the class by then, your flight line escort privileges will be revoked until you get the required training and card. Questions can be directed to Pass and ID at 431-2232.

COMBAT PUSH EXTENDED HOURS

Combat Push times are Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the Camp Cunningham Rec Tent from 0900L/0430Z to 1000L/0530Z and from 2330L/1900Z to 0030L/2000Z. Services, Comm and PERSCO will be available to sign outprocessing checklists. Personnel must complete their Post Deployment Health Questionnaire online and pick up their medical records at Flight Medicine/Public Health before coming to Combat Push. For more information call 431-4409.

EAGLECASH

All deployed personnel (military, civilian and contractors) utilizing Air Force finance office services within

the USCENTCOM AOR are required to have an EagleCash Stored Value Card and highly encouraged to use it. Additionally, the Bagram Finance Office has set-up a full-service EagleCash Card Center at the Friday Bagram Bazaar for your use and convenience. The Center has an EagleCash kiosk and a cashier to sign-up new card applicants and to exchange a check for uploaded EagleCash funds. Please sign-up for your EagleCash Card today.

COMBAT O

Combat Orientation is Thursday at 0900Z/1330L at the Enduring Freedom Chapel. This is a mandatory briefing for all Air Force personnel assigned to Bagram Air Field. Newcomers must attend the briefing within a week of their arrival. Accountability is tracked and will be forwarded to the 1st Sergeants at the end of the Week.

BATTERY DISPOSAL

Used batteries of any type should be turned in to supply for proper disposal -- do not throw them away in the trash. Expired batteries can be used by the enemy as part of explosive devices.